

SCU-NEWSLETTER No. 1-15.
Wednesday, January 21, 2015

1. Sad News.

Bill Miller. I am very sorry to report that we have lost one of the units' best agents – Bill Miller. Chapter 28 in 'The Secret Wireless War' is all about Bill and called '**Tea with the Germans.**' This is because extraordinarily, he and Allied intelligence officers in Tangier, would often take meals in cafés alongside their German and Italian counterparts! Bill allowed me to read his own notes before I started writing the chapter and I know he was pleased with the result. I thought of copying parts of the chapter here but many of you have 'The Secret Wireless War' and I would not know what sections to include or to leave out. Bill was a very brave and resourceful man.

Peter Westcombe.

Heather Gordon tells me: *'I only know what I read in the Green Book (MI6) which states that he was born in 1932, was in HM Forces 1947-57.'* **David White** adds: *'He joined DWS in 1960 and was posted to Delhi in 1961. He then went to Beirut, Djakarta, Singapore, and then did a spell in the training school at Poundon for a while. In 1976, he was posted to Baghdad, Mogadishu, Moscow and finally Pretoria in 1986. He was then the Duty Signals Officer at Hanslope till January 1992 when he retired and became a volunteer guide at Bletchley Park. I understand he was part of the Bletchley Archaeological Society, which saved it. I worked with him as my Duty Signals Officer for many years. Peter later asked me to join the team working to improve the presentation of Bletchley Park in 1992.'* Clearly, I shall have to research more but forgive me - I just had to record the sad loss of Peter at this first opportunity. In 2003, Peter chaired the launch of my book 'The Secret Wireless War' at Bletchley Park. He is a real loss to Bletchley Park.

2. A real wireless find – a picture of our MkXXI – at last! A friend in Oxford has just sent me a picture of the MkXXI agent's set – the first time I have seen one. (The picture comes from the collection Georges Ducreuzet et Dominique Soulier). The set is mentioned in Appendix 6 of 'The Secret Wireless War' – the technical aspect written by the late (and great!) Pat Hawker – with additional comments from me.

The receiver is sitting on the transmitter and everything seems to 'say' MI6 (Section VIII) Little Horwood factory!

I take pleasure in seeing the MkXXI's Morse key since it follows the pattern first made in the small trial run of the early MkVII's.

However, they were initially in RM70, a red fibre rod (we might now call '*plastic*'). I turned them (in line with the drawing given to me), on our smaller 'South Bend' lathe in Charlie West's workshop at Whaddon Hall.



However, on being transferred to nearby Little Horwood, I had an Atlas capstan lathe that made the job much easier but by this time, I used the black material shown in the picture.

Of course, the same design was used on all MkVII sets - including the MkVII/2 'The Paraset.' All that took place after I had left Little Horwood in the autumn of 1943 – for a very exciting life as a member of David Smith's team of seven in Mobile Construction, based back at Whaddon Hall.

David White now confirms – 'It looks like an MI6 (Section VIII) product. Probably made in the Little Horwood 'factory' near Whaddon Hall in mid/late 1944. It is not a superhet but a regenerative receiver. It would be able to tune in signals much better than the MkVII – for example – as it had a fine tune control. The receiver used 3 x 1T4 valves. It was obviously meant to use with its transmitter that had type 1 x S4 and 3 x A4 valves. The transmitters power of 0.75w means it had a very short range.'

It was seemingly quite acceptable to have agents with short-range sets – feeding into a ‘Control’ that had a MkIII transmitter that more easily reached Nash, Weald or ‘Main Line’ at Whaddon Hall. An example of this is a memo dated 13th August 1941 in which it states ‘...that a Mark III at Lisbon or in its vicinity and four suitcase models vibrator operated, distributed over the country would meet the case quite adequately....’ It goes on to say ‘...I will immediately contact XW [XW i.e Station X at Whaddon Hall]...and explain the urgency of the position...’

The same memo also mentions a ‘Main Line Station’ at Gibraltar – something that needs further research.

3. The French at Bletchley Park.

You may learn little in Bletchley Park Museum about the French connection. However, between 2003 and 2006, I received several letters from Derek Fowkes. Some were about the MI6 connection with ‘Slocum’s Navy’ but Derek sadly died before I could follow up his later – and most interesting account – of French intelligence services.

He wrote about the units both here (including Bletchley Park), in occupied France and North Africa. Derek lived in Cornwall and had a very real knowledge and understanding of our operations.

So far as Bletchley Park is concerned, there were three French officers stationed there between April 1940 and June 1942. Navy Lieutenant Marc Vey (*pseudonym* Mark Volney); Air Force Commandant Roger Baudouin (*pseudonym* Roger Baldwin) and Navy Lieutenant Andre Mirambel (*pseudonym* Andrew Merry). Vey and Mirambel lived at the Old George and Baudouin stayed at The Cock Hotel. **Left to right they are:**

Navy Lieutenant Marc Vey: Air Force Commandant Roger Baudouin:
Navy Lieutenant Andre Mirambel.

All of them were leading Linguist – Cryptanalysts.
Marc Vey was a multi-linguist and spoke German, Latin, Czech, Italian and variations on the Slav languages.

[On a personal note, my late brother Trevor was with SIS for 33 years. A Latin scholar, he spoke French, German, Italian, Spanish, fluent Mandarin and some Cantonese. He was the leading Sinologist in SIS (MI6). Forgive my intrusion into the story – Geoffrey]



Marc Vey was Professor at the Oriental Languages School, University of Paris. He was an officer in the French Naval Reserve, which he joined in 1934. At the outbreak of war in 1939, he was mobilised into the Navy’s code and cipher department.

This picture of them in uniform was taken in the area but we are not certain where? Derek thought it might be at York House School? It was on the London Road in Stony Stratford which Vey’s daughter Jacqueline attended. Stony Stratford is some six miles north from Bletchley along the ancient Roman road - Watling Street. However, I rather doubt they would have been seen outside in French uniform. Literally hundreds of BP staff were billeted with families in Stony Stratford, and in the surrounding villages and towns. However, the Cock, the Bull and Old George hotels were reserved for senior staff of BP & MI6 (Section VIII) – like Joyce Lilburn (née Hill) see Chapter 24 of ‘The Secret Wireless War’.

That did not prevent the Cock Hotel and the adjacent Bull, being the centre of jolly gatherings of Bletchley Park staff. Whilst it is likely an intellectual conversation in Greek or Latin would go over the local’s heads – that would be in the week. However, Stony Stratford came alive over the weekend and drew in hundreds of visitors from the surrounding area with The Cock and The Bull amongst the most popular haunts – *sometimes the rowdiest!*

With a ‘native’ population of around 4000 it was swelled by many of the BP and MI6 (Section VIII) staff in billets and it was well provided with pubs – I could still name its 14 hostelries – though some are closed – whilst a number are now Indian or Chinese restaurants. However, there are enough left for me to enjoy a trip down Memory Lane when I last visited the town, as I did on Monday 1st December, during a break from meetings at Bletchley Park and The National Museum of Computers.

In April 1940, Admiral Darlan and Admiral John Godfrey (Head of Naval Intelligence from 1939 to 1942), agreed a policy of co-operation. Vey was one of eight the Deuxieme Bureau sent to Bletchley Park to work on German, Italian and Russian Codes and ciphers. Commander Denniston warmly welcomed Vey as the only *multi-lingual* amongst the party. When Vey asked that his wife and daughter stranded in France could join him – Denniston agreed his request immediately. They were flown out of Le Bourget in a small twin engine aircraft on 3rd of June just three hours before the airfield was bombed by the Germans. Commander Wilfred Dunderdale, the senior member of MI6 in France, arranged the whole operation.

This is a complex and lengthy story – perhaps too much for a SCU-Newsletter. I wrote to Bletchley Park about finding this information and Gillian Mason, the Curator, wrote a kind letter back saying someone would contact me. That has not happened hence my setting it down briefly here.

In June 1940, the French at Bletchley Park, by now ten in number, were ordered back to France. There were eight Naval Officers and two from the Air Force. They were told a severe penalty would be imposed for not complying and a number went back. Vey and Mirambel bravely decided to stay but were deeply concerned as it meant losing their French Nationality, their pay and to be accused of desertion. In fact, all of that happened! Denniston stepped in once again and immediately paid their salaries and expenses.

Commander Wilfred ‘Biffy’ Dunderdale (MI6) now back in England had a brilliant idea to get round their loss of French Nationality and the accusation of desertion. He let the Vichy government know that Vey and Mirambel had refused to work for the British, been detained by force and interned in Oxford for the duration of the war. As proof of this, Dunderdale’s assistant Captain Blake-Budden produced phoney Alien Registration papers and leaked them to France. Some six months later their Nationality was restored. **Note:** It has been suggested that Wilfred Dunderdale was used by Ian Fleming as a basis for the character of James Bond.

I am in touch with Mona Barra (née De Witte). As a French student at a Paris University, she obtained her Master’s degree in English – having written her thesis on ‘The ULTRA secret: Security of the British Code breaking Operations in World War II’! One might easily say she could have chosen a simpler subject! At a RSS/SCU Meeting at Bletchley Park in 2010, I introduced Mona to the audience who had obtained her Masters Degree in English History – *magna cum laude* – about ULTRA and security at Bletchley Park. Mona is now taking a PhD in intelligence in World War I and World War II.

I hope to report more in due course as I am sure we shall be able to gradually expand the knowledge about the French working at Bletchley Park - even if it has to remain a subject for readers of SCU-Newsletters!

4. The Imitation Game.

I saw this film last week with my eldest son Laurence and we thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a little nearer the story of Bletchley Park than the film ‘Engima.’ Although much time was taken up with his homosexuality, perhaps it was intended to explain his difficulty in relationships with others? There are many inaccuracies but the producer clearly wanted a thriller – based on a real genius – not a documentary. I happen to believe Turing was indeed brilliant but at some stage I would like to see a Bletchley Park story nearer the truth.

As an aside, Commander Denniston’s family has complained that the ‘hectoring’ Denniston in the film does not correctly represent the man they knew. When you read about his actions to help Marc Vey’s family escape from France, his help with finance and so on – as described in **Item 3** above – it would seem the family are right and the filmmakers wrong.



Hey! When was the truth ever allowed to spoil a good script?

Wikipedia has an article on the film and reports its critical and commercial success. After a restricted release, it is now going on general release and no doubt will soon be available as a DVD. However, the article goes on to record under a heading ‘Accuracy’ its many *inaccuracies* - beyond my comments on Denniston’s approach to Turing. For example, it is the first time I have heard that Turing (and his fellow workers) called the Bombe ‘Christopher’ after a school chum!

The scriptwriters could easily have researched more thoroughly to avoid the gaffs but perhaps they just thought these fanciful touches made a better film? During a recent visit, I saw the bar erected in the Mansion ballroom as a prop for the film and it is very realistic. It is now a little difficult to remember the ballroom as it was but I hope it will be restored soon. Meantime, Bletchley Park is enjoying the influx of visitors that the film naturally generates – in the same way that ‘Enigma’ did a few years earlier.

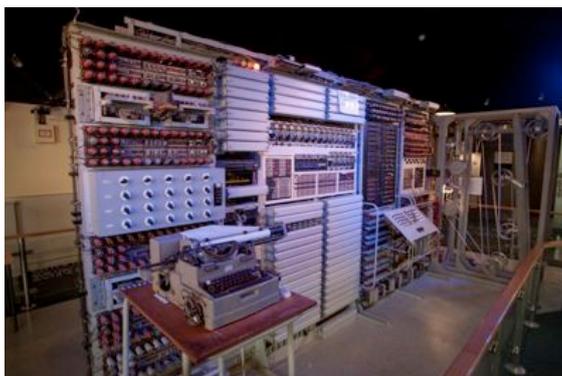
I have given several talks in the ballroom and my first book ‘The Secret Wireless War’ was launched there in 2003 - chaired by Peter Westcombe. Simon Greenish – the likeable and popular previous CEO of Bletchley Park, chaired the launch of my second book - about Edgar Harrison. It was Simon Greenish who obtained the Heritage Lottery Fund Grant for the work that has since taken place. He took Bletchley Park from near bankruptcy and was instrumental in spearheading its recovery that we see taking shape – though he might not like all he sees!

5. Colossus.

It is indeed a serious matter that visitors can turn up at the Bletchley Park Museum expecting to see the world’s first programmable computer – Colossus. Sadly, a steel fence, erected by Bletchley Park Trust, keeps them from easy access to this wonder machine during their visit to Bletchley Park museum! Colossus really did play a *major* role in our winning World War II. If common sense and tolerance does not prevail - then it may be necessary to seek government or more media attention to the matter.

The Germans produced a far more secure and sophisticated system than that based around the Enigma machine. It was called ‘Lorenz’ a totally different system based on the international Baudot teleprinter code but with a clever way of enciphering messages. The British ‘Tunny’ machine built to simulate the Lorenz was used to decipher once Lorenz settings had been identified. The German High Command (OKW) now had such faith in Lorenz that soon all High Command traffic used it. For example, from Rommel in the west to OKW up to ‘D-Day’ and beyond. To listen in to the German High Command traffic would be the turning point of the war. So it transpired!

We called it ‘Tunny’ and it had to be broken but where did Bletchley Park start? Colossus was the brainchild of ‘Tommy’ Flowers of the Post Office research station at Dollis Hill and a number of others. These included Max Newman a mathematician, ‘Bill’ Tutte who deduced the structure of the ‘Tunny’ machine and importantly, John Tiltman.



This picture of Colossus was taken in the National Museum of Computing (TNMOC) located at Bletchley Park. It is an independent charity, housing the largest collection of functional historic computers in Europe, including a rebuilt Colossus, the world’s first electronic computer.

It is all part of the Bletchley Park story that should be more widely available to the public without easy access denied by a steel fence – especially as Colossus is such an important and major attraction. At the moment, the current magnet of the ‘Imagination Game’ draws visitors and undoubtedly there is much to see in the restored site, even if the much-vaunted (and expensive?) new ‘C’ Block is a disappointment. I intend saying more about the Bletchley Park restoration in the next SCU-Newsletter.

6. At long, last my ‘Bathroom Book’ is launched.

Those who have read ‘The Secret Wireless War’ will know that I stopped writing our family’s involvement in the bathroom industry back in 1997 when David White – the Curator of the Bletchley Park wireless museum (now closed by Bletchley Park Trust) – persuaded me to write about the work of our unit MI6 (Section VIII).

Busted Flush! The Thomas Crapper Myth (*subtitled*) ‘My Family’s Five Generations in the Bathroom Industry’ was launched at the Science Museum in November last year. It is covered in my new but temporary website www.geoffreypidgeon.com Do please watch the little (8 minute) film on it made by the Science Museum in 2012. It was supposed to take 4 hours to make but took twice as long – because we couldn’t stop laughing – I was still struggling at the end!

My best wishes to you all

Geoffrey